


# Chapter 4

## The Effect of Plague and Epidemic Diseases on Home Healthcare Services and New Approaches to This Problem

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### ABSTRACT

*Plague and other infectious diseases have historically put significant strain on health systems and highlighted the importance of home healthcare services. Diseases like the plague, which affected large portions of the population, overloaded health systems and increased the need for alternative care models beyond traditional healthcare services. In this context, home healthcare services, telemedicine, and telehealth have emerged as important solutions, reducing the pressure on hospitals and allowing for safer treatment of patients. During pandemics, home care not only meets acute treatment needs but also facilitates individuals' isolation processes, becoming an appropriate care model in line with social distancing rules. The home care approach gained more prominence during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially as hospitals' capacities were limited and healthcare staff was insufficient, leading to an increased demand for home healthcare services and a rapid adoption of digital health technologies.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, epidemic diseases have posed serious threats to individual health (Patterson et al., 2021). The Black Death, which ravaged Europe in the 14th century, is one of the most striking examples of such impacts. Lasting only four years, this epidemic caused the death of more than one-third of Europe's population (Shang et al., 2021). Similarly, smallpox, which arrived in the Americas along with the Europeans, devastated the social structures, leading to the rapid decimation of indigenous populations and triggering secondary disasters such as famine and starvation. In more recent history, epidemics like the Spanish flu (1918–1919) not only caused mass deaths but also particularly affected the young and working-age population, resulting in labor loss and economic disruption (Patterson et al., 2021). Today, epidemics such as HIV/AIDS, Ebola, Zika, and COVID-19 have overwhelmed the capacities of health systems and led to severe consequences. The 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa, in particular, increased public distrust in government policies and triggered attacks against healthcare workers. This situation made it more difficult to control the epidemic (Shang et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has created more global and long-lasting effects than other outbreaks. Rather than the virus's direct impact, the restrictions implemented to prevent its spread—such as curfews, quarantines, and travel bans—brought economic systems to a near halt. Simultaneously, disruptions in essential healthcare services made it difficult for especially chronically ill individuals to access treatment, and health systems became incapable of adequately responding not only to COVID-19 but also to other health problems (Patterson et al., 2021).

The effects of epidemics have not been limited to health; they have also been felt on psychological and social levels. During the Black Death, people lost trust in doctors and clergy; similarly, during the COVID-19 process, distrust toward scientists led to the spread of conspiracy theories and anti-mask behaviors (Shang et al., 2021). This shows that individual risk perception and societal reactions have largely resembled each other throughout history and that social structures continue to form on the same foundations despite changing circumstances.

During the pandemic, while the demand for home healthcare services increased especially in Turkey, it decreased in the United States. According to a study conducted in Massachusetts, 98.7% of home healthcare agencies reported a decrease in home visit demands during the pandemic (Afshari et al., 2022). However, according to data from the Turkish Ministry of Health, there was a 500% increase in applications to the Home Healthcare Services Communication Center during the early days of the pandemic (Duru et al., 2025: 42–43). This indicates that Turkish society adopted home healthcare services as an alternative and safe means of access. Pandemics have not only resulted in painful outcomes throughout human history but have also

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